

LIGHT UP

OR

BURN OUT



Self-Care Strategies for Those
Who Serve the Suffering

Dr. Emily Hervey

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Light Up or Burn Out: Self-Care Strategies for Those Who Serve the Suffering

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Worldwide Writings

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Introduction

It was 2005. The tsunami had hit Southeast Asia months earlier and devastated entire regions. The original shock had worn off, search and rescue teams had done all they could, the first responders had gone home, and now the long process of rebuilding was underway. I was studying psychology and wanted to be of service, so I took a semester to volunteer in a small town in Thailand that had been mostly wiped out by the tsunami. I lived and worked in a center designed to provide care for the long-term and short-term volunteers in the area, as well as some outreach to the community. While I meant well, I was not prepared. I didn't know how to honestly assess my own capacity and wellbeing. No one briefed me on self-care principles and the concept of compassion fatigue was not yet widely discussed. In the end, pre-existing health issues made it necessary for me to leave earlier than planned. I was disappointed in myself and felt I'd let others down when leaving the other counselor without back-up staff. Now I see many things that could've been done in a healthier way.

While we've made huge strides since then in learning about topics like trauma, resilience, stress, and self-care, we still see high rates of burn-out among many of the caregiving professions. Pastors, teachers, humanitarian aid workers, volunteers, and many other caregivers often start with a compassionate desire to help others, but end up trying to carry too many people's burdens. They often find it difficult to ask for help carrying their own burdens. The initial fulfillment that comes with seeing an impact being made on the lives of others may fade under the growing awareness of the endless needs that will never be met. Stressors on practical, relational, organizational, and emotional levels start to take their toll. When compassion for the hurting gets too overwhelming, the helper may start to feel numb or detached. Health problems, strained relationships, exhaustion, and disillusionment are all red flags that burnout may be imminent. The good news is that it can be prevented!

Not everyone responds to trauma and stress in the same way. There are many factors involved, a combination of risks and resources. While some

factors are outside of our control (e.g. genes, personal history, nature of the crisis or disaster), there are many ways to manage risks and maximize resources.

This book is made to first help leaders and caregivers understand the risks of negative responses to stress, trauma, and burnout prevention. Understanding the needs of those facing crises and trauma is an initial step toward offering effective care. Assessment tools are included to help identify some of those needs and vulnerabilities, both for the caregiver and the people being served.

The second component is discovering strategic ways to maximize resources, including promoting resilience and enhancing care for oneself and others on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. The same principles of care we use for our own wellbeing can be applied in the lives of those seeking our help. Helping others is done most effectively once we've learned to care for ourselves. Self-care sets an example for others to follow.

Both components of care are based on the most foundational principle in the Bible: LOVE. We are not called to be the source of love; *God is love*. We are called to be conduits of that love, and we can only pass on what we ourselves have received. Accepting love and care from God and others is not equivalent to selfishness. It is a key component to living out the commandments (and invitation) given by God to love Him and love others.

The Greatest Commandments

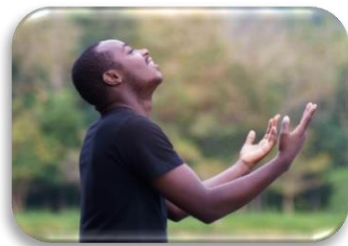
“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” And he answered, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.” (Luke 10:25-28, NASB)

In both the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27) we are told the greatest commandment is to love God with our whole self: heart, soul, mind, and strength. These are all parts of our identity, making them areas for growth and healing. The second commandment is to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Loving God with a Healthy Self

Think of how you select a gift for someone you love. Generally, we want it to be of high value, in good condition, useful, beautiful, and significant. How do you think your loved one would feel if you presented a rusty, bent, old tool that was no longer useful? Probably not very appreciated!

When we give our lives to God, He takes us in all our brokenness, welcoming us with loving arms. We are certainly not required to be perfect-looking or win the prize for “most effective tool for the kingdom.” However, if we want to love God with our whole selves, we need consider how we are taking care of ourselves. We are invited to “present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Romans 12:1, NASB). When choosing a sacrifice, the Jews were expected to bring an animal without blemish, well-cared for, and healthy. Likewise, we must present ourselves having been redeemed and cleansed through Christ, and now doing our best to take care of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.



In the Church today, there often remains an emphasis on “works,” with value placed in doing, serving, teaching, and leading. Success in the

secular world, measured by accomplishments and influence, bleeds into our views of being “successful” believers, especially in areas of ministry. We feel the duty to work hard until we see results, the obligation to give of ourselves until the needs of others are met, and the responsibility to invest in the lives of others until we see transformation. Working, giving, and investing are all good things! But *HOW* and *WHY* they are done is also important. When done out of guilt or duty, we are no longer living the gospel of grace, and get worn out and discouraged if we don’t see results. When done out of love, the action itself can be fulfilling, without worrying about the outcome, trusting God’s sovereignty for the long-term results.

In multiple parables, Jesus describes servants or stewards who have been entrusted with care of the Master’s resources for some time, and when He returns, they are called to give an account for how they used those resources. Sometimes we interpret that as illustrating the need to produce a visible profit for the kingdom. But it is not just about the outcome. If you worked for a company and were given use of a company vehicle to do business, you would likely take good care of the car. Instead of driving the car as fast as you could to get as much as you could done as quickly as possible, you would likely follow the appropriate speed for the best of the car, the driver, and everyone else on the roads. If the fuel light went on, you’d make sure to fill it with gas. If a warning light showed a problem with the engine, you’d get it checked out and fixed. To be a responsible steward of the car, you would take good care of it! Likewise, we have each been given one body to last our entire time on earth. For our bodies to function well for long-term use and efficiency, we need to make sure to take good care of them along the way. We can’t expect to serve God well if constantly trying to run on an empty fuel tank and ignoring signs that we need to get some maintenance and rest. Failure to take care of ourselves on emotional, physical, spiritual, and relational levels is not just sacrificial self-denial, it is poor stewardship. To give God the best gift we can, we need to take care of ourselves well.

Loving Ourselves as We Love Our Neighbor

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commands, the follow-up question was “Who is my neighbor?” He told the story of the good Samaritan, who saw a man in need, stopped, put aside all cultural and

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societal reasons for rejecting the man, cared for him physically, took him to a place for rest and recovery, and paid for someone else to care for him. That was a display of genuine love, which we are called to demonstrate. But consider the second half of the commandment: “as you love yourself.” Is this also how we love ourselves? Do we show ourselves attention and care as needed? Do we put aside self-criticism and offer ourselves grace? Do we tend to the wounds we’ve endured and get help from others to care for ourselves if necessary? Some of us may find it easier to love others than to love ourselves, but both are necessary for a healthy equilibrium.

If we are not receiving the love of God and of others, then it will be difficult to be vessels of love to the world. Think of the illustration of the church as the body of Christ. In the human body, if one organ is shutting down, the rest of the body is also affected. For the body to function well on a long-term basis, every part needs consistent care. Failure to take care of oneself takes a toll on the family, the team, the church, and the ministry.

To love God completely and to love others effectively, you must take care of your whole self.

Before continuing, take a moment to think about your own belief systems about care for self, compared to the commandments we have been given.

Reflections

What does it mean to live sacrificially? If you are offering your body as “a living sacrifice,” how much value do think one should place in caring for oneself?

Why are we commanded to love others as we love ourselves? How does loving yourself currently compare to loving others?

A Story of Suffering and Sacrifice

Pastor Miguel¹ had always been highly respected in his community nestled in the center region of Puerto Rico. He was known for his faithful service to God and his compassion for those who were hurting. He often visited those who were sick and encouraged those who were struggling emotionally or spiritually.

When Hurricane Maria, hit the island, Pastor Miguel huddled with his family in their modest home, fervently praying for safety. But despite their prayers, the storm's relentless onslaught took its toll, leaving their home in ruins, along with many others in the church. The Category 4 storm washed out most of the roads, leaving the town without electricity or clean water, and very little access to humanitarian aid.

In the aftermath of the hurricane, as the full extent of the devastation became apparent, Pastor Miguel felt that his calling to serve his community had never been more critical. Although he was able to set up a temporary shelter for his own family, much of his time and effort went toward helping others who faced similar devastation.

For the first week he was working from dawn to dusk, trying to help pull people out of the rubble, care for the injured, and set up shelters. Most of the community rallied around each other; no outside volunteers or humanitarian aid workers were able to get past the mudslides that destroyed their roads. As limited supplies were air dropped by helicopters, he took the responsibility to distribute them based on the most dire needs. Each night he was exhausted, and fell asleep quickly without much time to think about all that had happened.

As the initial shock wore off, the reality of the loss started to set in. Pastor Miguel witnessed and listened to story after story of devastation and grief. He too had lost friends, and had been unable to contact relatives on the other side of the island. At times he tried to bury his own pain so as to be a comfort to others, but soon he found himself avoiding those

¹ Pastor Miguel is not an actual individual, but a compilation of similar stories around an actual event.

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conversations. It was even difficult to talk to his wife and children, although he tried to be comforting to them too.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, yet resources remained scarce. Four months after the storm, there was still no electricity, running water, or cell signal. Pastor Miguel found himself teetering on the brink of exhaustion. Physically drained, emotionally spent, and spiritually weary, he struggled to find the strength to carry on. He tried to appear strong on the outside to meet the expectations of the community, but felt like he was falling apart on the inside. While he still knew the right Bible verses to offer as comfort to others, he grappled with his own questions of why God would allow such suffering to happen.

Nine months later, Pastor Miguel was invited to a weekend retreat in San Juan. For the first time since the hurricane, he found other people ministering to him, with no expectations that he care for anyone else. During a group session, he heard other pastors tell similar stories and felt many of his own emotions surfacing. When he told his own story, he realized it was the only time he had shared his emotional and spiritual struggles with others. As he verbally processed his experiences and reactions, he started to feel less weighed down. Instead of carrying everyone else's burdens, he began to unpack his own.

By the time he went home, Pastor Miguel had discovered that to effectively help others, he had to also address his own grief, loss, fear, and overall exhaustion. Feeling refreshed and renewed made him more capable of sharing compassion and hope. After setting aside time for rest and prayer, he looked at what relationships were more important to him. He started with his own family, prioritizing his relationship with his wife and children, then made an effort to connect with other pastors for mutual support. Soon he found it brought him more joy to again serve his community, as they continued to rebuild homes and hearts.

Understanding Stress

Stress: Definition and Reactions

Stress can be defined as “a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stresses can be external (from the environment, psychological, or social situations) or internal (illness, or from a medical procedure). Stress can initiate the ‘fight or flight’ response, a complex reaction of neurologic and endocrinologic systems.”¹ Sometimes we use the word “trauma” to describe a very stressful situation, because some of the initial reactions are similar. However, stress is more common, and usually does not go to the extreme of intense fear for one’s life, or that of another.

In fact, in small amounts, stress can actually be helpful. For example, an upcoming deadline can cause us to stay more focused and use our time more efficiently. When experienced as a source of motivation, and lasting for a short period of time, it is not always harmful. Sometimes known as “eustress,” it can help us adapt in a way that improves our lives and can cause us to be more alert and direct more energy toward a specific issue or task.

For most of us, any significant components of change can be stressful, even when there are positive outcomes. Personal changes in responsibilities, habits, or relationships generally require energy for the process of adaptation. Factors outside our control, but affecting the people and environment close to us, also require us to adjust.

Chronic Stress

Sometimes stress can come in multiple forms on a daily basis, especially when managing crises or working in a context outside our culture or daily norms. While any single source of stress may be fully within our capability to handle, facing numerous major adaptations on a regular basis can push us toward the edge of our coping capacity.

Chronic stress can cause negative and sometimes harmful results physically and psychologically. When hormones, such as cortisol, are being released in excess over a long period of time, it takes its toll on the immune systems, as well as increasing risks for problems in the

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musculoskeletal, respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal, nervous, reproductive systems. Physical symptoms include tense muscles, headaches, IBS, weight gain or loss, and others. Unhealthy ways of coping with stress, such as overeating or consuming alcohol, can cause additional health problems. Psychological concerns, such as depression and anxiety, can also develop.

The more sources of stress we experience, the higher intensity of our stress, and longer time we spend facing these levels of stress, the higher the risk for the body and mind to malfunction. When our systems are in survival mode for an extended time, the energy no longer goes toward taking care of the rest of the body, mind, and soul.

Stress During a Disaster

In the midst of a disaster, we often think of the impact of the event itself—including witnessing the reality and pain of suffering and trauma—as our main source of distress, which will be discussed in the next section. But the Red Cross identified other significant sources of stress that can be external, such as working conditions and organizational structure, and internal, including unrealistic expectations and heroic aspirations.²

External Stressors

Volunteers and other humanitarian aid providers often come out of their daily norms and find themselves in physically difficult work with fewer resources of support. Some have long hours of work that can be physically and emotionally draining. If staying in temporary housing, lacking things like comfortable beds and good food might interfere with good sleep and nutrition. Adjustment to different locations, different schedules, different responsibilities, and different people (including co-workers or roommates) can all be forms of stress.

The organizational system in place can also contribute to the stress. While some organizations that specialize in disaster response have clear protocols that define leadership and responsibilities, various local churches, non-profit organizations, and individuals may have good intentions, but limited or chaotic forms management. Stress can be heightened by inconsistent leadership systems and supervision, unclear expectations for roles and responsibilities, limited communication about

appropriate tasks or resources, and the absence of assessment and care for individual needs. All these factors can take a toll on relationships, quality of service, and overall wellbeing.

Those in roles of leadership, whether formal or informal positions, may also encounter stress when decisions are required but there is limited or inaccurate information about the risks, needs, and resources, when other groups are not collaborating, and when conflicts or other personnel problems emerge. Without previous protocols in place, the process can be confusing and overwhelming. When there are many responsibilities and not enough people, leaders may find themselves juggling many different roles with a high demand for time and energy. Without appropriate boundaries and self-care, these composite stressors can take their toll.

Internal Stressors

Often people who come with the desire to help others are not mentally prepared. When facing big tasks, we all have expectations about our own abilities and the overall outcome. Upon seeing widespread devastation or deeply wounded people, the reality that we are unable to fix all the problems or meet all needs sets in. It can cause us to feel overwhelmed, disappointed, frustrated, or even guilty for having more resources than the survivors we see. Some respond by feeling obligated to work tirelessly, ignoring their own physical and emotional needs, and quickly heading toward burnout. Others are overwhelmed emotionally, particularly when lacking their usual coping mechanisms or support systems. Without means of processing one's experiences and reactions, these forms of internal stressors can affect the body and soul.

Assessing Our Stress

There are ways to increase our capacity to manage stress, as well as finding ways to reduce it. A good place to start is identifying the sources of stress that could influence our wellbeing. The second step is to evaluate our own vulnerability to stress, based on concrete measures of behaviors and environments.

Activity 1: Measuring Life Stress: The CHOPS Stress Inventory[©]

The following 10 categories list areas of stress that are often experienced by humanitarian, mission, and development workers. Using the scales below please rate how stressful each of the following areas were/are **during the past month**. Consider the examples of possible experiences to guide your responses. Note that many of these stressors can be both a source of stress and/or a symptom of stress.²

Area and Possible Experiences	Level of Stress During Past Month				
	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme
1. CULTURAL Getting needs met in unfamiliar ways: Housing, food, transportation, etc. language learning, culture shock, reentry, feeling rejected, overlooked, or undervalued by the dominant international culture, gender bias, prejudice, lack of opportunity/ freedom...					
2. CRISES Potentially traumatic events: Natural disasters, wars, accidents, evacuations, disease outbreaks, death of someone close to you, political instability, protracted armed conflicts and physical threats, one’s own community and/or country affected...					

² CHOPS Stress Inventory ©Adapted from O’Donnell, K. & Lewis O’Donnell, M. (2012). Used with permission. Retrieved from <http://membercareassociates.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CHOPS-Stress-Inventory-Updated%2%A9-2015.pdf>.

Adapted in consultation with the O’Donnells by Dr. Laurie A. Tone, 2015. For more information on usage of CHOPS, including successes and strategies, visit: <https://membercareassociates.org/getting-equipped/chops/>

3. HISTORICAL Unresolved past areas of personal and social struggle: Family of origin issues, personal weaknesses, lack of educational, health, economic opportunities...	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme
4. HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS With family members, colleagues, nationals, raising children, couple conflict, struggles with team members, social opposition, caring for aging parents, few school options, human rights violations, harassment, persecution, discrimination, stigma...	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme
5. OCCUPATIONAL Job-specific challenges and pressures: Work load, travel schedule, exposure to people with problems, job satisfaction, more training, government "red tape", job insecurity, short-term contracts, work not understood or respected, seeing problems that are complex/that I can't help...	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme
6. ORGANIZATIONAL Governance and management: Incongruence between one's background and the organizational ethos, policies, work style, management practices, expectations, incompetence, corruption, abusive leadership, dysfunction, disability practices, legal protection, training...	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme

<p>7. PHYSICAL Overall health and factors that affect it: Nutrition, climate, illness, aging, environment, no medical resources/insurance and inadequate nutritional options, injuries/road traffic accidents...</p>	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme												
<p>8. PSYCHOLOGICAL Overall emotional stability and self-esteem: Loneliness, frustration, depression, unwanted habits, developmental issues/stage of life issues, transition, grief, loss, cumulative impact of “adverse life events” ...</p>	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme												
<p>9. SUPPORT Resources to sustain one's work: Finances, housing, clerical/ technical help, donor contact, minimum pay and/or financial support, finances used for survival and not just for one’s work...</p>	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme												
<p>10. SPIRITUAL Relationship with the Lord: Devotional life, temptations, time with other believers, spiritual warfare, finding meaning, evil, inner growth, practices/disciplines, lack of trust/respect for spiritual leaders...</p>	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme												
<p>How would you rate your overall level of stress over the past month?</p>	Minimal	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme												
<p>Please mark the 3 categories that were/are the most stress producing over the last month.</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Cultural</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Occupational</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Support</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Crises</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Organizational</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Historical</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Physical</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Human</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Psychological</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>					<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupational	<input type="checkbox"/> Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Crises	<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational	<input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual	<input type="checkbox"/> Historical	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical		<input type="checkbox"/> Human	<input type="checkbox"/> Psychological	
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<p>Please identify 3-5 specific stressors that caused distress over the past month. They may or may not be listed in the possible experiences or 10 categories.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
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Take a moment to record these stressors in Appendix A.



Activity 2: How Vulnerable Are You to Stress?³

In modern society, most of us can't avoid stress. But we can learn to behave in ways that lessen its effects. Researchers have identified a number of factors that affect one's vulnerability to stress - among them are eating and sleeping habits, caffeine and alcohol intake, and how we express our emotions. The following questionnaire is designed to help you discover your vulnerability quotient and to pinpoint trouble spots. Rate each item from 1 (always) to 5 (never), according to how much of the time the statement is true of you. Be sure to mark each item, even if it does not apply to you - for example, if you don't smoke, circle 1 (I always limit myself...) next to item six.

	Always		Sometimes		Never
1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I get 7-8 hours of sleep at least four nights a week.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I give and receive affection regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have at least one relative within 50 miles, on whom I can rely.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.	1	2	3	4	5

³ University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, August 1985. Scale Developers: Lyle Miller and Alma Dell Smith of Boston University Medical Center.

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6. I limit myself to less than half a pack of cigarettes a day.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I take fewer than five alcohol drinks a week.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am the appropriate weight for my height.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have an income adequate to meet basic expenses.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I get strength from my religious beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I regularly attend club or social activities.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, and teeth).	1	2	3	4	5
15. I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry or worried.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I have regular conversations with the people I live with about domestic problems - for example, chores and money.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I do something for fun at least once a week.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I am able to organize my time effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I drink fewer than three cups of coffee (or other caffeine-rich drinks) a day.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I take some quiet time for myself during the day.	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring Instructions: To calculate your score, add up the figures and subtract 20.

Self Score:

Total _____ **- 20 =** _____

Score Interpretation:

A score **below 10** indicates **excellent resistance** to stress.

A score **over 30** indicates **some vulnerability** to stress.

A score **over 50** indicates **serious vulnerability** to stress.

Take a moment to record your resistance/vulnerability in Appendix A.

Self-Examination

Take a few minutes to review your sources of stress and means of managing stress. Write down:

My biggest sources of stress are:

Practical ways I can reduce stress include:

One way I can improve resistance to stress this week is:

Thinking of Others

Take time to consider the sources of stress and vulnerability for those close to you and under your leadership.

Family and Friends:

Are there people in your household that are experiencing high levels of stress? If so, how can you support one another and reduce vulnerability to stress?

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Consider friends or colleagues that you trust. With whom could you share your stressors and vulnerabilities? How can you encourage each other and hold each other accountable in making changes?

Under Your Leadership:

Consider the environment of your work or ministry. How can it be made a place to reduce rather than increase stress?

How often do you check on the wellbeing of those who work with you? How might you assess their needs on the job and work together to address areas of vulnerability?

Understanding Trauma

Trauma: Definition and Reaction

“Trauma” has become a word used frequently to describe distressing situations. However, it’s important to understand the difference between trauma and stress. There are many challenging or demanding situations that might be stressful, we recover fairly quickly without long-lasting effects, especially with appropriate coping strategies and support systems in place.

Trauma is defined by our own reactions, not the event itself. It triggers an overwhelming sense of fear, helplessness, or horror, which can upset a person’s sense of security, make it difficult to trust others, and disrupt emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. What is traumatic for one person might not be traumatic for another. “Potentially traumatic events” (PTE) refers to scary situations that *could* result in traumatic reactions, but are not traumatizing for everyone.

Based on a clinical definition, acute stress or trauma refer to *experiencing or witnessing specific, severe events, such as the threat of death, actual or threat of injury, and actual or threat of sexual violence.*³ Exposure to trauma can also be through learning of a relative or close friend being exposed to the trauma or having indirect exposure to the details (such as first responders, therapists, and medical professionals who are seeing the results and hearing the stories). When hearing stories and seeing images from multiple sources of media, our brains construct memories linked to the same physical and emotional reactions caused by being there in person.

It is normal to have strong reactions to these kinds of fear-inducing events; in fact, our bodies are made to react for own protection. When sensing danger, the brain and the gut send signals to trigger a state of defense, enabling the human body to fight back or run away with more energy than it is usually capable of using. That’s why your heart and lungs are pumping more blood, your adrenaline and other hormones are released, and other systems stop using up energy (e.g. digestive system). In addition to the “fight or flight” modes of defense, sometimes the survival reaction is to freeze, just as that might protect someone from

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being seen by a predator. How our bodies react is not based on decision-making or reasoning; it is based on how we are wired.

After a *Potentially Traumatic Event* some reactions include:⁴

Domain	Negative Responses
Cognitive	Confusion, disorientation, worry, intrusive thoughts and images, self-blame
Emotional	Shock, sorrow, grief, sadness, fear, anger, numbness, irritability, guilt, and shame
Social	Extreme withdrawal, interpersonal conflict
Physiological	Fatigue, headache, muscle tension, stomachache, increased heart rate, exaggerated startle response, difficulties sleeping
Domain	Positive Responses
Cognitive	Determination and resolve, sharper perceptions, courage, optimism, faith
Emotional	Feeling involved, challenged, mobilized
Social	Social connectedness, altruistic helping behaviors
Physiological	Alertness, readiness to respond, increasing energy

Some people recover fairly quickly, especially with the needed support, feeling of safety restored, and appropriate closure. What takes place in the first 48 hours affects how the brain and body process the event. Providing “Psychological First Aid,” or helping establish security, making sure needs are met, and being available to listen when someone is verbally processing what just occurred, can make an impact on how well and how quickly they recover. Other factors include the severity of the event, their existing coping mechanisms, exposure to previous trauma, and genetic predispositions or personality traits.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Some individuals have more severe reactions, classified as “Acute Stress Disorder” for the first four weeks, and “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) if lasting longer than that. A single symptom doesn’t mean it is a disorder, nor should this be a permanent label. But being aware that this is a real concern that can receive help is valuable. Symptoms to watch out for include:⁵

- **Re-experiencing the trauma** (at least one way):
 - Intrusive thoughts
 - Nightmares
 - Flashbacks (feeling like it is happening all over again)
 - Emotional or physical distress after being exposed to something related to memory of the trauma
- **Avoiding trauma-related stimuli** (at least one way):
 - Thoughts or feelings related to trauma
 - Physical reminders of trauma
- **Worsened negative thoughts or feelings** (at least two):
 - Inability to recall key features of the trauma
 - Overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world
 - Exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma
 - Negative mood/feelings
 - Decreased interest in activities
 - Feeling isolated
 - Difficulty experiencing positive mood/feelings
- **Worsened arousal and reactivity** (at least two ways):
 - Irritability or aggression
 - Risky or destructive behavior
 - Hypervigilance
 - Heightened startle reaction
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Difficulty sleeping

Not everyone who experiences trauma develops PTSD. In fact, the majority are not distressed to the point of having a *disorder*, but still may

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have some of the individual symptoms. When working with people who have experienced trauma, it is important to be aware of the wide range of reactions and show support and acceptance along the way.

Assessment of Trauma

If you are concerned about you or someone you know showing some of the symptoms described, you can get a better picture of the possible need for professional help. Do NOT try to make a diagnosis; it's not just about scores. But do consider taking action if it is needed.

Post-Traumatic Growth

While highly stressful or traumatic experiences can have a number of negative effects, going through distressing situations can also push us to adapt, grow, and mature. Known as "post-traumatic growth," experiencing suffering can lead to growth in:

- Personal strength and resilience
- Appreciation for life and relationships
- Secure spiritual or existential beliefs
- A sense of purpose and meaning
- Empathy and compassion for others

As James wrote to early believers, *"Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance"* (James 1:2-3, NASB). Having close relationships with God and others can help us hold on to hope, develop emotional and spiritual maturity, and relate to others who also experience suffering. Post-traumatic growth does not replace the pain of suffering, nor does it suddenly make us mature, enduring people immediately after the event. It is part of the healing process.

Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

Secondary Trauma

When in the role of helping those who have experienced trauma, whether a first responder, humanitarian worker, pastor, or non-professional helper, a person may be exposed to the impact of suffering, whether seeing the destruction caused of a disaster or hearing painful stories of fear and loss. Frequent or extended interaction with such devastation and pain can lead to vicarious or secondary trauma, especially for those natural in showing empathy and compassion. Common characteristics include:

- Emotional and psychological symptoms similar to those experienced by individuals directly impacted by trauma, such as intrusive thoughts, nightmares, anxiety, or depression.
- Difficulty separating one's own emotions from those of the individuals they are assisting, leading to a blurring of boundaries between personal and professional life.
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or burnout resulting from exposure to the suffering of others.
- Changes in worldview or belief systems as a result of witnessing the extent of human suffering.

Compassion Fatigue

Closely related to secondary trauma is compassion fatigue. While also related to witnessing the suffering of others, it can occur in a wider range of people and events, not only those that are trauma-inducing. Constant interaction with those who are hurting, whether as a professional or a loved one, may gradually lead to decreased empathy, increased desensitization or feeling numb, and declining quality of work.⁶ Sometimes this fatigue manifests not only in emotional reactions, but also physical symptoms.

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Burn Out

Without proper care and healthy boundaries, ongoing stress, exposure to trauma, and compassion fatigue can all contribute to eventual burnout. Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, often manifest in irritability, anxiety, depression, and physical problems.⁷ It can have a negative impact on relationships at work and at home. While compassion fatigue can play a significant role in burnout for helpers, there are usually other forms of stress being experienced on a regular basis that contribute to its development. It is like a candle burning at both ends, which quickly leads to getting burnt.



Charles Figley, an early proponent of the study of compassion fatigue, contributed the description of the cost of caring in Table 1.⁸ It includes symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout. You may notice that many overlap with reactions to trauma, as they are closely related.

Table 1: Caregiver Reactions

Cognitive		Emotional		Behavioral	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Diminished concentration o Confusion o Spaciness o Loss of meaning o Decreased self-esteem o Preoccupation with trauma o Trauma imagery o Apathy o Rigidity o Disorientation o Whirling thoughts o Thoughts of self-harm or harm toward others o Self-doubt o Perfectionism o Minimization 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Powerlessness o Anxiety o Guilt o Anger/rage o Survivor guilt o Shutdown o Numbness o Fear o Helplessness o Sadness o Depression o Hypersensitivity o Emotional roller coaster o Overwhelmed o Depleted 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Clingy o Impatient o Irritable o Withdrawn o Moody o Regression o Sleep disturbances o Appetite changes o Nightmares o Hypervigilance o Elevated startle response o Use of negative coping (smoking, alcohol or other substance abuse) o Accident proneness o Losing things o Self harm behaviors 	
Spiritual		Interpersonal		Physical	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Questioning the meaning of life o Loss of purpose o Lack of self-satisfaction o Pervasive hopelessness o Ennui o Anger at God o Questioning of prior religious beliefs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Withdrawn o Decreased interest in intimacy or sex o Mistrust o Isolation from friends o Impact on parenting (protectiveness, concern about aggression) o Projection of anger or blame o Intolerance o Loneliness 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Shock o Sweating o Rapid heartbeat o Breathing difficulties o Aches and pains o Dizziness o Impaired immune system 	
Impact on Professional Functioning					
Performance of Job Tasks		Morale	Interpersonal		Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Decrease in quality o Decrease in quantity o Low motivation o Avoidance of job tasks o Increase in mistakes o Setting perfectionist standards o Obsession about details 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Decrease in confidence o Loss of interest o Dissatisfaction o Negative attitude o Apathy o Demoralization o Lack of appreciation o Detachment o Feelings of incompleteness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Withdrawal from colleagues o Impatience o Decrease in quality of relationship o Poor communication o Subsume own needs o Staff conflicts 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Absenteeism o Exhaustion o Faulty judgment o Irritability o Tardiness o Irresponsibility o Overwork o Frequent job changes

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Activity: 3: Measure of Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue

This tool is particularly helpful for those working directly in settings of disaster response and trauma. Helping the hurting can be fulfilling, but also draining. It can help to get a better picture of how we are affected by being the givers of compassion, also identifying if we're in danger of burnout.

Profession Quality of Life: Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue

Subscales

Helping others puts you in direct contact with other people's lives. As you probably have experienced, your compassion for those you help has both positive and negative aspects. Consider each of the following questions about you and your current situation. Write in the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these characteristics in the last 30 days.

0=Never 1=Rarely 2=A Few Times 3=Somewhat Often 4=Often
5=Very Often

- √ _____ 1. *I am happy.*
- 0 _____ 2. I am preoccupied with more than one person I help.
- X _____ 3. I get satisfaction from being able to help people.
- √ _____ 4. *I feel connected to others.*
- 0 _____ 5. I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.
- X _____ 6. I feel invigorated after working with those I help.
- 0 _____ 7. I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a helper.
- √ _____ 8. I am losing sleep over a person I help's traumatic experiences.
- 0 _____ 9. I think that I might have been "infected" by the traumatic stress of those I help.
- √ _____ 10. I feel trapped by my work as a helper.
- 0 _____ 11. Because of my helping, I have feet "on edge" about various things.
- X _____ 12. I like my work as a helper.
- 0 _____ 13. I feel depressed as a result of my work as a helper.
- 0 _____ 14. I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have helped.
- √ _____ 15. *I have beliefs that sustain me.*

- X _____ 16. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with helping techniques and protocols.
- √ _____ 17. *I am the person I always wanted to be.*
- X _____ 18. My work makes me feel satisfied.
- √ _____ 19. Because of my work as a helper, I feel exhausted.
- X _____ 20. I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I help and how I could help them.
- √ _____ 21. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work or the size of my caseload I have to deal with.
- X _____ 22. I believe I can make a difference through my work.
- 0 _____ 23. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of frightening experiences of the people I help.
- X _____ 24. I plan to be a helper for a long time.
- 0 _____ 25. As a result of my helping, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.
- √ _____ 26. I feel “bogged down” by the system.
- X _____ 27. I have thoughts that I am a “success” as a helper.
- 0 _____ 28. I can’t recall important parts of my work with trauma victims.
- √ _____ 29. *I am an unduly sensitive person.*
- X _____ 30. I am happy that I chose to do this work.

B. Hudnall Stamm, 2009-2012. Professional Quality of Life: Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue Version 5 (ProQOL). www.proqol.org. This test may be freely copied as long as (a) author is credited, (b) no changes are made, and (c) it is not sold.

Self-scoring directions

1. Be certain you respond to all items.
2. **On some items the scores need to be reversed.** Next to your response write the reverse of that score. (i.e. 0=0, 1=5, 2=4, 3=3). Reverse the scores on these 5 items: 1, 4, 15, 17 and 29 (*in italics*)
0 is not reversed as its value is always null.
3. **Mark the items for scoring:**
 - a. Put an x by the following 10 items: 3, 6, 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 27, 30
 - b. Put a check by the following 10 items: 1, 4, 8, 10, 15, 17, 19, 21, 26, 29
 - c. Circle the following 10 items: 2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 23, 25, 28

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4. Add the numbers you wrote next to the items for each set of items.
Note scores in table below.

	Score	High	Average	Low
Compassion Satisfaction (items marked by "x")		41+	40-33	0-32
Burnout (items marked by check "v")		28+	27-20	0-19
Compassion Fatigue (circled items)		17+	16-9	0-8

Reflections

Compare these scores with your level of stress vulnerability and sources of stress. What relationships between the measures do you notice?

If you scored high on compassion fatigue and/or burn-out, how do you see that affecting other areas of life?

What could be changed in your workplace to prevent or address patterns of compassion fatigue and burnout? How might compassion satisfaction be promoted?

Spiritual Struggles

In the midst of crises and disasters, we are surrounded by suffering, whether imposed by nature, humans, or a combination thereof. Many will find their belief systems shaken, as previous perceptions of God, people, and self are incongruous with the atrocities being witnessed. In the midst of chaos and desperation, acts are committed that violate one's sense of morality, and at times even the responder or caregiver is faced with ethical dilemmas where there are no easy solutions. Belief in God's love and sovereignty may be difficult to defend when considering the destruction He allowed to occur, even to the most vulnerable people.

Theodicy: A Good God in a Suffering World?

Leaders and caregivers are exposed to a wide variety of suffering, sin, and pain. For many, there seems to be a dissonance between what they are witnessing and the belief that God is both loving and powerful. Some struggle with the question of why a good God would allow such evil and suffering, known as theodicy. For centuries theologians and philosophers have presented different explanations, while the average person experiencing grief and trauma is simply crying out, "Why, God?? Why would you allow this?" There is room for addressing these questions at a mind level (cognitive), and at a heart level (emotional).

Responses to the Mind

When processing reality and Scripture, there are three primary explanations for theodicy.

- Free Will:⁹ Some would argue that suffering comes as a consequence of human sin, because God has given us free will. Without free will, we would not be able to have a true, loving relationship with God. But with free will, human choices cause much suffering.
- Soul-Making:¹⁰ Others point out that suffering is necessary for spiritual growth; without it, we wouldn't need God, our faith would be meaningless, and there be minimal character development. As James wrote in his epistle, "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And

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let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4, NASB).

- Greater Good:¹¹ Finally, some emphasize the promise that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28, NASB). In essence, we may not understand it in the here and now, just as Job had no way of knowing why he was enduring suffering, but God’s plan is ultimately perfect, and suffering is necessary for the final outcome. In fact, the suffering of Jesus Himself was necessary for our salvation and God’s glorification.

Responses to the Heart

When working with people during a crisis, many survivors are NOT seeking a logical, theological explanation for the pain and loss they are experiencing. In those moments, “Why?!?” is an expression of emotions: confusion, despair, grief, abandonment, and anger. These are not the moments to offer promises about the ultimate good or opportunities for growth. Instead, these are times when the wounded and vulnerable need to feel loved and accepted. The helper’s empathic presence is far more important than their theologically sound words. These are the moments when the responder can share the pain, just as Christ shared our own suffering.

Preparing and Processing

Helpers often need to deal with their own belief systems, while also being prepared to respond to those crying out in their suffering. There are times for genuinely wrestling with theodicy on a cognitive level, searching the Bible and asking questions. It is valuable to allow room to grapple with the general questions and explanations, sometimes in preparation for inevitable exposure to true suffering.

Reflecting on historical and personal accounts of the “good” outcomes of suffering can be powerful. There are countless testimonies of Christians’ actions during persecution leading to the repentance and salvation of the persecutors. For many of us, our internal sanctification process turns turmoil into intimacy with Christ and dependence on His strength. Real examples of God’s redemptive power can be encouraging, and are available throughout the Bible and across the globe.

Personal reflection on how God was at work or what He taught us during our own challenges makes the “good” outcome more real and helps resolve the cognitive dissonance. At the same time, we must be prepared to accept the lack of understanding—the times where it doesn’t make sense and no good seems to be coming out of tragedy. When we surrender to God’s will without logic or understanding, we act out of faith. Firmly grounded faith is what secures us in the tumultuous storms of life.

Moral Injury: Internal Turmoil

Not only do we struggle with understanding God in the context of suffering, many times we question ourselves and our own faults. “Moral injury” can be described as the spiritual, emotional, and psychological distress caused by a violation in deep moral and ethical beliefs.¹² The sources of moral injury can include:

- Acts of Commission: Performing actions that cause harm.
- Acts of Omission: Failing to perform actions that were morally warranted.
- Betrayal by Leaders or Institutions: Experiencing betrayal by leaders or institutions that fail to uphold moral and ethical principles.

Symptoms of moral injury include:

- Emotional Symptoms: Persistent feelings of guilt, shame, anger, and sorrow.
- Cognitive Symptoms: Ruminations over the event, self-condemnation, and loss of trust in oneself or others.
- Behavioral Symptoms: Withdrawal from others, increased risk-taking, and self-destructive behaviors.
- Spiritual Symptoms: Crisis of faith, loss of meaning or purpose, and existential distress.

Moral injuries were first recognized in veterans who questioned the atrocities they had witnessed and committed in a war context. Today, we also see evidence of moral injuries in the midst of disasters or complex crises. For example, in situations where resources are scarce and the

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need is great, such as a disaster where many are in serious conditions but few medical professionals or equipment, a responder may be forced make decisions that allow one person to survive and another to die. Feelings of guilt and responsibility can be long-lasting, especially when there is no opportunity to process what occurred.

Preventing and Addressing Moral Injury

To mitigate the impacts of moral injury, several strategies can be used. Prior to deployment, responders should receive training in ethical decision-making and be provided with clear guidelines to support their actions during crises. This can help reduce the individual burden of decision-making by framing choices within an established ethical context. Nevertheless, protocols don't prevent the emotional impact of seeing another person suffer based on one's actions or failure to act. Without means of processing the events, the choices, and the outcomes, moral injury can take its toll emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

A number of steps can be taken to address moral injury:¹³

Structured Debriefings: During and after crises, responders should have access to regular debriefings. These sessions provide a safe space to discuss experiences and decisions, helping to process and validate their actions. Peer support and supervisor-led debriefings can be particularly effective in addressing lingering doubts and emotions.

Creative and Therapeutic Expression: Responders who continue to struggle with feelings of guilt, regret, and anger may benefit from creative outlets like journaling, art, or narrative therapy. Sharing these expressions in a supportive environment, whether with a therapist, in a spiritual setting, or within a peer group, can facilitate moral repair and emotional healing.

Professional Support: Access to mental health professionals and spiritual advisors who understand the nuances of moral injury can provide deeper levels of support. These professionals can offer tailored interventions that address the psychological and spiritual dimensions of moral injury, aiding in the overall recovery process.

Reflections

How have your experiences of suffering or witnessing suffering challenged or changed your beliefs about God's goodness and power?

How do you reconcile or struggle to reconcile the existence of evil and suffering with the belief in a benevolent and omnipotent God?

Can you identify a specific instance where you felt a profound sense of moral injury? How did this experience affect your sense of purpose and meaning?

In what ways can your faith or spiritual practices help you cope with and find meaning in the aftermath of morally injurious experiences?

Building Resilience

One reason why some people can cope more effectively with life's challenges is their strong *resilience*. **Resilience** is the ability to adapt and bounce back in the face of adversity, trauma, or significant stress. It involves coping with challenges, setbacks, and traumatic experiences in a way that maintains overall well-being and facilitates personal growth. It is not about avoiding stress or trauma, but rather about effectively navigating through them and recovering from them.

In the midst of stress and trauma, **MOST PEOPLE SHOW RESILIENCE**; it is not a super-hero trait. Resilience itself can grow and mature in the midst of suffering, much like a muscle that is strengthened when put to use in a healthy way.

As Donald Meichenbaum wrote:¹⁴

“Resilience turns victims into survivors and allows survivors to thrive. Resilient individuals can get distressed, but they are able to manage the negative behavioral outcomes in the face of risks without becoming debilitated. Such resilience should be viewed as a relational concept conveying connectedness to family, schools, and community. One can speak of resilient families and communities and not just resilient individuals.”

So what does a resilient adult look like? Patterns can be seen in thoughts, behaviors, belief systems, emotions, and relationships.¹⁵

These include:

- Remaining adaptive and flexible, with active coping skills
- View of self: showing self-acceptance and respect, while always looking at opportunities for improvement
- Reframing negative memories and reducing constant assessment of threat
- Accepting stress, trauma, and failure as opportunities to grow
- Holding positive core beliefs, positive expectations for the future
- Embracing a personal moral compass and finding purpose in life
- Finding faith: a capacity for hope, and spiritual beliefs that convey meaning in life

- Having healthy family relationships
- Maintaining a supportive social network
- Seeking help when needed and seeking to help others
- Attending to one's physical health

Resilience and Trauma: Prevention and Response

Resilience acts as a protective factor against the development of trauma-related disorders such as PTSD. Individuals with higher levels of resilience are better equipped to cope with stressors and adversities, reducing their vulnerability to the negative effects of trauma. By fostering resilience in individuals and communities ahead of time, it is possible to mitigate the impact of potentially traumatic events and promote overall well-being.

When individuals do experience trauma, resilience serves as a foundation for effective coping and recovery. Resilient individuals are more likely to engage in positive coping strategies, seek support from others, and maintain a sense of hope and optimism even in the face of adversity. This resilience enables them to navigate the challenges of trauma more effectively, leading to better outcomes in terms of psychological and emotional well-being. Additionally, resilient individuals are more likely to adapt well to changes, find meaning in their experiences, and grow from adversity. All of these can contribute to post-traumatic growth.

Paul, who experienced many potentially traumatic events, gave a good example of resilience. He described his response to trials in his letter to the Roman church: *"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us"* (Romans 5:3-5, NIV).

Activity 4: Discovering Your Resilience:

This tool helps establish a better picture of the key strengths we have in the midst of challenges. We can also see components of resilience in need of further development. It can also be used as a tool in working with others to identify their capacity to deal with adverse situations.

Coping And Resilience Evaluation Scale (CARES)©¹⁶

Instructions: For each statement, write in the number that honestly reflects how much you agree or disagree.

**0=Strongly Disagree 1=Disagree 2=Neither Agree nor Disagree
3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree**

- _____ 1. I am able to bounce back quickly from difficult situations.
- _____ 2. I believe that I can overcome challenges that come my way and grow stronger in the process.
- _____ 3. I have confidence in my ability to handle stressful situations and find effective ways to manage stress.
- _____ 4. I tend to see setbacks as opportunities for growth.
- _____ 5. I have supportive relationships that help me cope with adversity and provide emotional support.
- _____ 6. I am able to maintain a positive outlook even during challenging times.
- _____ 7. I look for meaning and purpose in adversity.
- _____ 8. I adapt well to change and stay flexible in times of uncertainty.
- _____ 9. I use active healthy coping skills to navigate challenges.
- _____ 10. I have a healthy self-image and recognize both my strengths and weaknesses.
- _____ 11. I take care of myself physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- _____ 12. I am able to seek and accept help when I need it, without feeling weak.
- _____ TOTAL: Add up the scores for each response.

While the following categories are approximations, consider how the description of your score resembles your capacity to manage adversity.

Low Resilience (≈0-16): Individuals with low scores may struggle to cope effectively with adversity, exhibit limited adaptive skills, and experience significant difficulty bouncing back from challenges.

Moderate Resilience (≈17-32): Individuals with moderate resilience demonstrate some capacity to cope with adversity and maintain a

positive outlook, but may still face challenges in certain areas of resilience.

High Resilience (≈33-48): Individuals with high levels of resilience exhibit strong adaptive skills, effective coping strategies, and a positive outlook, enabling them to navigate challenges with confidence and resilience.

Relational Resilience

A key factor for individual resilience is healthy relationships. This is directly connected to the resilience of groups as a whole, including families, teams, and communities. In contrast, unhealthy relationships, on all levels, can be sources of stress, and therefore risks.

Family Resilience:

When living with and caring for one's family, a high priority needs to be healthy relationships, which contribute to resilience. Walsh¹⁷ identifies three key factors of family resilience: belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes. Positive belief systems carry meaning and hope, making struggles look less daunting, instead becoming opportunities to grow and overcome. Organization patterns are based on connectedness and adaptability, being able to adjust roles and share emotional and practical resources. Finally, effective, open communication is critical for family resilience. Families where it is safe for members to be honest, share emotions, ask questions, and contribute to problem-solving are better equipped to manage stress and adversity.

Team, Organizational, and Community Resilience:

Efficient work in the context of crises and disasters requires good cooperation, whether within an organization or through partnership with other groups. When functioning on a team, relationships can contribute to either stress or support. Although not on the same level of intimacy, many of the characteristics of family resilience are also applicable to team resilience. With members often coming from a wide variety of backgrounds norms and values may differ, so work in a cross-cultural context may require intentional effort to understand each other and find common ground. Even in the midst of addressing suffering, promoting purpose and meaning to the work being done can be motivational. At the

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same time, open communication leaves room for processing the negative thoughts and emotions that may be triggered.

Consistent leadership and clear expectations can provide stability in the midst of chaotic situations. At the same time, adaptability is necessary in the ever-changing contexts and roles. Effective communication that provides accurate information and space for contributions before making decisions creates a sense of trust, inclusion, and clarity.⁴

Nurturing Resilience

We can actively seek to cultivate our own resilience and the resilience of the people around us. By creating an environment of vibrant relationships, positive mindsets, and healthy self-care practices, we can increase resilience on individual and community levels. Long before facing crises and disasters we can:

1. Cultivate social support: Build strong connections with family, friends, and community members who can provide emotional support, encouragement, and practical assistance during challenging times.
2. Develop problem-solving skills: Enhance our ability to effectively problem-solve and adapt to changing circumstances by learning how to identify and address challenges constructively.
3. Foster optimism: Encourage a positive outlook by focusing on strengths, opportunities for growth, and hopeful possibilities, even in the face of adversity.
4. Practice self-care: Prioritize healthy activities such as exercise, adequate sleep, healthy nutrition, relaxation techniques, and hobbies that bring joy and relaxation.

⁴Resources for assessing and improving resilient teams can be found through Member Care Associates: <https://membercareassociates.org/getting-equipped/team-development/>

5. **Develop flexibility:** Build resilience by remaining flexible and adaptable in the face of change, uncertainty, and setbacks. Embrace a mindset of learning and growth.
6. **Set realistic goals:** Break down larger goals into smaller, manageable tasks, and celebrate progress along the way. Setting achievable goals can boost confidence and motivation.
7. **Foster gratitude:** Reflect on the ways we have been blessed, expressing appreciation for all God has done in our lives, and focusing on what we can be thankful for, even during difficult times.

We can use these suggestions as a starting point for identifying ways to proactively improve our own ways of handling challenges, and means of building the resilience of our families and communities.

Reflections

Look at the items on CARES where you agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. What has helped you develop those assets?

Look at the items where you disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. What tools of nurturing resilience might help you grow?

How can you improve resilience in your family? Your team? Your community?

Healthy Habits: Taking Care of the Whole PERSON

Establishing a healthy lifestyle is best done with a holistic approach. One way to remember the different components of our lives is using the acronym PERSON: Physical, Emotional, Relational, Spiritual, Occupational, and Needs. We cannot make immediate changes in all the areas overnight, but here are some key considerations to get you started. As you review the list, consider what change might be beneficial in your life.

Physical Habits: Do everything in moderation.

Listen to your body's signals, such as tiredness, tenseness, or sources of pain. Ignoring these messages doesn't make the problem disappear.

Create consistent and healthy patterns.

- Set a consistent pattern for sleep.
- Choose food based on its value (taste and nutrition), not cravings or a rushed schedule. Have what is good for you more easily accessible than what is unhealthy.
- Stay hydrated.
- Keep moving: find enjoyable ways to exercise.
- Take breaks to relax and notice where you are tense.
- Practice breathing slowly through your nose.
- Identify what helps you relax and use it on a regular basis (e.g. warm bath, walking, massage, etc.).
- Avoid excess caffeine, alcohol, sugar, smoking, and other unhealthy habits.

What have you done in the past that helped you feel relaxed, rested, and/or energized?

What does your body say would be most helpful and needed?

What unhealthy habits need to be changed?

Emotional Habits: Identify, accept, and express your feelings.

For some, negative feelings are uncomfortable, so emotions in general are ignored or stifled. Others haven't developed the capacity to manage emotions, and find it easy to be overwhelmed when small triggers result in intense fear, tears, or angry reactions. Sometimes we have to make it a habit to intentionally explore our emotions and their source.

- At the beginning of each day, notice how you are feeling. If positive, appreciate what you have to look forward to on that day. If negative, notice what thoughts are attached. Write them down, and consider how accurate they are, identifying what may be more realistic.
- Choose three reasons to be grateful during the day.
- Notice emotional reactions that might be different or stronger than before (easily getting angry, often hypervigilant, feeling down, etc.). Ask yourself where they are coming from.
- Notice general emotional trends. Are you more optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic?
- Make room for grieving losses, being aware that a wide range of emotions are normal, not to be condemned.
- Find healthy ways of expressing those emotions (e.g. talking with someone, praying, journaling, creative expression, etc.)
- Use healthy humor: find a positive source of laughter.
- When feeling negatively about someone, purposefully stop and identify one thing you can appreciate about the person.
- When feeling positively about someone, find a way to help them feel valued.
- At the end of each day, reflect on your strongest emotions, both positive and negative. Appreciate what brought you joy, and notice what triggered negative reactions. Choose a reason to be grateful and reflect on it as you relax.

What unhealthy emotions do you notice? Think of a way to address their source. _____

What brings you joy? How can you maximize that?

Relational Habits: Invest well in those closest to you.

Quality relationships play a significant role in our levels of resilience, capacity to handle stress, and reactions to crises. At the same time, we may take out our negative reactions on them. Establishing patterns of healthy relationships in advance makes them easier to maintain during difficult situations. Here are possible ways to nurture close relationships.

- Make sure you have a couple people around you who can both listen to you and share honestly. Set up a regular time for a chat or call.
- Give yourself permission to ask for help. Clearly express your needs to others in your inner circle. Ask what their needs are.
- Recognize that stress can cause strain on relationships. Notice how it might influence yours and be careful not to “take it out” on your loved ones.
- When you do react negatively, be ready to apologize. When others around you react, be ready to forgive.
- Check in at the end of each day with family members, making sure no one goes to bed with unresolved conflict.
- If you have children, acknowledge their emotions and help them process them rather than hide them.
- Find out what makes your spouse/family members feel loved. Write a list of possible ways to express love, and make a goal of purposefully using one each day.
- Hugs are wonderful (if they are appreciated).
- Set appropriate boundaries. Know your limits and help those around you know they are firmly maintained.
- Spend time together doing enjoyable activities on a regular basis. Each serves to create a positive memory.

Consider who is most important to you. How do you purposefully:
Express what you appreciate about them?

Act in ways you know will bring them joy?

Share challenges and celebrations with each other?

Spiritual Habits: Make time with God a priority.

Just as our relationships with other people are critical and require intentional effort, our relationship with God is essential. If we value it, we must be willing and ready to make consistent habits centered on connecting with Him. There are many “spiritual disciplines” than can be practiced to draw near to God on an individual and corporate level. Consider trying one to practice as a regular part of the day or week.

- Set aside time for reading the Bible reflectively. Rather than just finishing the chapter, take time to reflect on the words. Ask God to show you what He wants you to know.
- Spend time praying, as a conversation with Jesus. Allow room to express your own emotions and concerns to Him, while also taking time to listen.
- Discover creative ways to worship God. Choose specific forms of creativity (visual, auditory, etc.) to express yourself.
- In times of grief, explore the “psalms of lament” as a means of expression.
- Find consistent fellowship with other believers who want to share their spiritual journeys with you.
- Seeks mentorship and accountability or prayer partners. Set regular times to check in with each other and be vulnerable when struggling with doubts or hoping for growth.
- Allow time to process challenged belief systems. Write down what you’re struggling with and create room for those questions.
- Read devotions and books from others who have had similar experiences and grown from them. Choose your reading material carefully, but be open to a variety of perspectives.
- Observe the Sabbath as a time sanctified for rest. Remember that the Sabbath was made for us, not us for the Sabbath.
- Explore other spiritual disciplines and set purposeful goals.

What has helped draw near to God in the past? _____

How important is your relationship to God? How does your schedule reflect that prioritization? _____

Occupational Habits: Find (and create) stability in your work.

Many of us devote a lot of time and energy into our work and ministry, causing our occupation/vocation to play a significant role in our well-being. While we have different levels of responsibility and supervision, we often don't realize our capacity to make a difference for our own work patterns and the general environment.

- Set routines for tasks and breaks.
- Begin each week by identifying goals and noting which items are of the greatest priority.
- Delegate tasks strategically based on what needs to be done.
- Make small, daily decisions with appropriate input, but be careful not to make big decisions when feeling overwhelmed.
- When your current systems aren't working well, remember there are other options. Think creatively and invite co-workers to offer other ideas.
- Limit demands on time and energy: decide at what point in the day work ends and home begins.
- Make your work environment a safe, open, encouraging one. Plan regular times to check in with anyone under your leadership.
- Reflect at the end of the week on what went well and how you can encourage others who were involved.
- Reflect on what did not go well and identify how it could have been done better.
- Debrief with your co-workers after significant effects, hearing with open ears, allowing them to process, and brainstorming on what could be learned.
- Connect on a regular basis with others in a similar position to offer mutual support and feedback.

Examine your current role in your job or ministry. How can you communicate well with both superiors and those under your leadership?

Identify what could be done better. What are small steps to take in that direction? _____

Nurturing Needs: Balance your own needs with the needs of others.

- Looking over the previous lists, evaluate your current situation and what needs change in each category.
- Determine what roles you are trying to fill in different circles, which roles take the most time and energy, and how each serves to meet needs or create new ones.
 - Identify which roles are critical for you (e.g., relationships), which are important for your position, and which can be delegated to others.
- Input needs: Determine how much “information” goes into your mind and where it comes from (news, social media, gossip, web-surfing, etc.). Are the sources healthy and amount of time used valuable?
 - Be careful not to get too caught up in all the negative, conflicting messages, but make sure you are adequately informed from trustworthy sources.
- Output needs: Decide what you value giving back to society. What is fulfilling to share with others? We can contribute hope or fear, peace or conflict, truth or confusion, unity or division.

Most important roles: _____

Most critical responsibilities: _____

What can be shared with others: _____

Highest sources of input (time spent): _____

Ideal limitations for each source: _____

Forms of output: Looking at regular conversations, what do you tend to contribute in words and tone? _____

What would you like to share with others and how?

Write down the biggest habitual change needed in each category:

Physical: _____

Emotional: _____

Relational: _____

Spiritual: _____

Occupational: _____

Nurturing Needs: _____

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Habits can't all be changed at the same time, nor can they be changed overnight!

That is why it is valuable to look at the big picture and identify the biggest need. Within that need, determine what YOU can change in behavior and mindset. Break those changes down into small practical goals. Choose two specific tasks/practices and set SMART goals:



Specific



Measurable



Attainable



Realistic



Time-Based

Rather than a broad intention (e.g. "I'm going to get more family time."), be specific, stating it in a way that can be measured, that is within your capacity, that is not unreasonably high, starting in small increments of improvement, and that has an end point.

Examples:

Physical: I'm going to take 2 minutes for diaphragmatic breathing before I go to work each day.

Emotional: At the beginning of each day, I will write down three reasons to be grateful.

Relational: I'm going to have at least four meals with my family next week.

Spiritual: I'm going to get up at 7AM each morning to read a Psalm during my usual coffee time.

Occupational: On Friday afternoon I will meet with my co-workers to get feedback on what we did well and what we could improve.

Needs (Input): I will keep my maximum time on social media to 30 minutes each day and write down the times I start and stop.

Record the two goals you choose in *Appendix B: Setting Healthy Habits*. Put them on your schedule (whether written and visible, alarms on your cell phone, or another creative means), and share them with someone who will ask you at a set time. Don't get discouraged if you did not complete your goal as much as you would like; observe what changes you were able to start making and adjust the details to make it more practical and/or realistic. Continue practicing it the next week with any needed adjustments made.

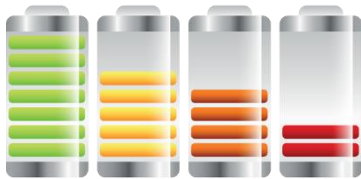
Self-Care for the Caregiver in Crises

In times of crises, multiple sources of stress are usually compiled, including practical demands, complex logistics, high levels of need, and frequent lack of resources. Caring for others overwhelmed by the crisis can also be physically and emotionally draining. Seeing tragedy around us can be painful, particularly in the midst of our limitations and frequent inability to meet all the needs being presented. It is important to make room for REST, RENEWAL, and REFLECTION.

Rest and Renewal

Every person is unique in their needs and their reactions to crises. Some may find themselves energized by the opportunity to help those in need, while others quickly find themselves drained when witnessing suffering and empathizing with the pain around them. Often we'll see both reactions, one hour feeling encouraged by the opportunity to provide food to someone who expresses deep gratitude, and the next hour overwhelmed with compassion for the devastated parent who lost a child or the vulnerable woman who had no home, no food, and no means of income.

It is important to make time for rest if we want to function well, to love well. We often function as a battery: if we don't get re-charged, we



eventually won't function. It's better to get re-charged on a regular basis than to get to the point of being completely drained.

Taking a break on a regular basis to rest physically, perhaps drinking a glass of water, stretching, and having a healthy snack, as well as getting good sleep every night will help the body function well. We also need to identify sources of emotional and spiritual renewal: what makes us feel refreshed. Some tools only take a few minutes, while others deserve a longer length of time.

(See Appendices C and D for sample directions.)

Here are some tools for renewal:

Short: 2-10 minutes

- Diaphragmatic breathing: Slow down your breathing, inhaling through the nose and expanding your belly instead of raising your shoulders, holding your breath for a few seconds, then slowly releasing the air. This process tells your body it is safe to relax, slowing down the shallow, fast breathing that is a typical reaction to stress.
- Breath prayer: Choose a simple phrase, such as a prayer or part of a Bible verse (e.g. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”) As you inhale, think the first part of the phrase (“The Lord is my shepherd”), receiving His presence, His peace, His comfort. After holding it for a moment, slowly exhale as you think the second part of the sentence (“I shall not want”) releasing all your worries back to Him.
- Peaceful imagery: Close your eyes and picture yourself in a place where you feel safe and relaxed. Think of the different senses: What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel on your skin? Enjoy being in that place.
- Progressive muscle relaxation: Work through different sets of muscles, first tensing them tightly, then releasing all the tension as you exhale, noticing the sensation of relaxation (see Appendix D for more specific directions).

Medium: 30 minutes to 2 hours

- Emmanuel Approach: Picture yourself in a joyful memory. Ask Jesus to show you where He was in that memory. Spend time with Him in that memory, expressing gratitude for what He was doing, and inviting Him to show you whatever He wants you to know.
- Lectio Divina: Read a passage (*lectio*), asking God to show you a specific word or phrase to think about. Read it again, meditating on that word or phrase, asking God what is significant about it (*meditatio*). Read it again, and consider how you want to respond (*oratio*). Finally, rest in God’s presence, asking Him if there’s anything He wants to tell you today (*contemplatio*).

- Journaling
- Artistic expression
- Music
- Dancing
- Enjoying nature
- Whatever has helped you feel relaxed in the past!

Extended: 1 to 7 days

After working in a high-stress environment for an extended period of time, it can be very helpful to take a retreat, whether by yourself or with a small group of people. There are many varieties of retreats, some more structured than others. Consider what your needs are at this time, whether silence and solitude or instruction and affirmation.

Also include vacation in your long-term planning. Regardless of how far you go geographically, set aside time where you are not available for your work, making it clear you will not be responding to phone calls and emails. Planning for it ahead of time will also give you something to look forward to, a goal to reach when starting to feel overwhelmed.

Reflection

After facing a crisis as a responder or caregiver, it helps to verbally process the experience; this is particularly effective when with someone who is a good listener. It is valuable to allow the expression of emotions, including the painful ones, with some who can empathize, which we are called to do when sharing each other's burdens. But it is healthy to not end on the negative note, instead also identifying the positive part of the experience, such as the change to make a difference in someone's life, the fulfillment found in showing Christ's love, and the relationships formed or deepened. Often we don't see all the positive results we might have liked, but that doesn't take away from the value of serving others just as we would serve Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46).

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Difficult situations can also be optimal times for growth, particularly when approached with an attitude of humility. Take this opportunity to consider what went well and what could have been done better. We often see our own limitations and flaws emerge when under pressure, making it a time to embrace both grace and growth. Just as precious metals are refined by fire, so our faith and character are refined by the trials we face (1 Peter 1: 6-7, Isaiah 48:10, Proverbs 17:3).



Overall, reflecting on our experience helps us put it into perspective and take something positive out of it. It is valuable to set aside part of this time for prayer, engaging in interaction with Jesus, inviting His peace, expressing gratitude, and asking Him what it is that He would like you to know or learn (this is integration of the Immanuel Approach and Passing the Peace).

Running the Race

The task of caring for others is a marathon, not a sprint. Pouring out all our resources—our energy, our health, our relationships, our time—early on sets us up for breaking down part way through. Marathon runners learn to pace themselves; they know their limits, they make sure they are staying hydrated, and watch out for signs of heat stroke. Most also have coaches and supporters checking up on them along the way. Running alone can be lonely and discouraging. Instead, we need to be running together, encouraging one another, at times in the role of the runner, at times being the encourager and supporter.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2, NASB)



Appendix A: Personal Profile on Stress Management

Review your responses from the first three activities and fill in the scores:

Activity 1: Sources of Stress

Mark the three categories producing the most stress over the last month.	<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural <input type="checkbox"/> Occupational <input type="checkbox"/> Support <input type="checkbox"/> Crises <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual <input type="checkbox"/> Historical <input type="checkbox"/> Physical <input type="checkbox"/> Human <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological
Please identify 3-5 <u>specific</u> stressors that caused distress over the past month. They may or may not be listed in the possible experiences or 10 categories.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Activity 2: Resistance and Vulnerability to Stress

Self-Score: Total _____ - 20 = _____

Score Interpretation:

A score **below 10** indicates **excellent resistance** to stress.

A score **over 30** indicates **some vulnerability** to stress.

A score **over 50** indicates **serious vulnerability** to stress.

Activity: 3: Measure of Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue

	Score	High	Average	Low
Compassion Satisfaction (items marked by "x")		41+	40-33	0-32
Burnout (items marked by check "v")		28+	27-20	0-19
Compassion Fatigue (circled items)		17+	16-9	0-8

Activity 4: Discovering Your Resilience

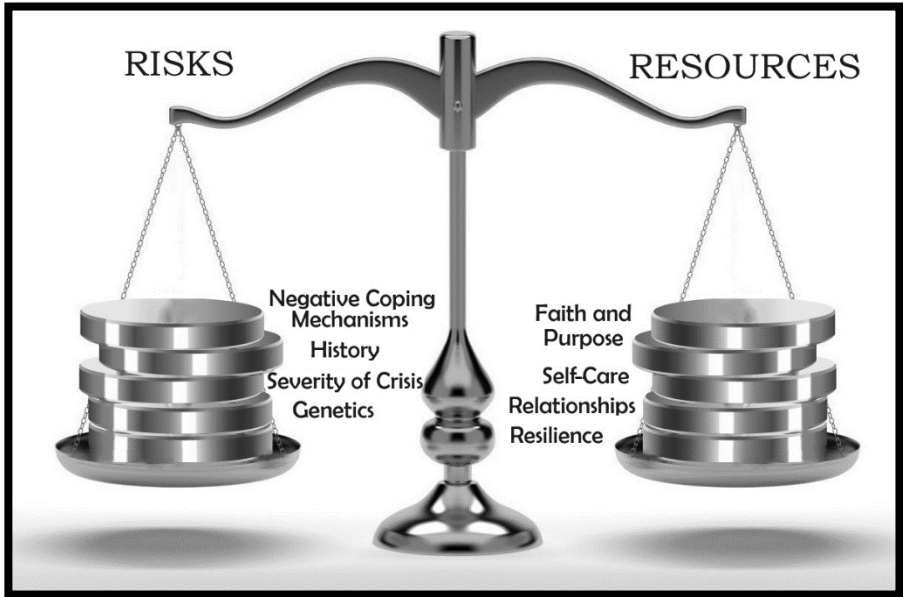
Coping And Resilience Evaluation Scale (CARES)

Total: _____/48

Based on these questions, do you see yourself as having low, moderate, or high resilience?

Risks and Resources

The likelihood of burning out is based on the balance of resources and risks. Your capacity to manage crises can increase or decrease based on the factors put on both sides.



Looking over the assessments, list the risks and resources you see:

RISKS: _____

RESOURCES: _____

If there is an imbalance with fewer resources and more risks, carefully consider what can be done to decrease factors like stress and increase factors like self-care. Use the following Appendices to plan concrete steps you can take.

Appendix B: Setting Healthy Habits

Look over the PERSON categories of healthy habits. Choose 1 or 2 practical ways to practice healthy habits you've identified. Go through the SMART criteria to set a goal or two for this week.



Specific



Measurable



Attainable



Realistic



Time-Based

1) Habit: _____

2) Goal: _____

How is it:

- Specific: _____
- Measurable: _____
- Attainable: _____
- Realistic: _____
- Time-based: _____

1) Habit: _____

2) Goal: _____

How is it:

- Specific: _____
- Measurable: _____
- Attainable: _____
- Realistic: _____
- Time-based: _____

Who will you tell about these goals and when will they check to see if you have done it?

Name: _____ Time: _____

Appendix C: Finding Rest and Renewal

Thinking of past times when you have felt tired or stressed, identify what has been most refreshing and relaxing:

Physically:

Emotionally:

Spiritually:

Who are two or three people you know would be will listen if you need to talk?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How frequently do you take a Sabbath?

When was the last time you had at least one week off from work?

When is your next planned vacation?

Appendix D: Relaxation Exercises¹⁸

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This exercise involves systematically tensing and relaxing different muscle groups. This is a good relaxation exercise for those who have trouble concentrating, or experience racing thoughts or other mental distractions. You may leave your eyes open or close them, as you prefer. Experiment with how much you tense your target muscles: some find tensing tightly is most helpful, while others use “threshold tensing,” just tightening enough to barely sense the tension.

Start out by taking a few deep breaths into the abdomen. Just notice the breath. Do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

Make a fist with your right hand, and tense the muscles in your right forearm, allowing the rest of the arm to remain relaxed. Study the sensations of tension. Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite arm, and in the rest of the body. When you’re ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. You may imagine it’s like a fire hose that was rigid and becomes more flexible as the water drains out, or any image that works for you. Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left fist and forearm.

Raise your right shoulder, pin your right upper arm to the side of your body, and tense the muscles in the right upper arm and shoulder. Study the sensations of tension. Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite arm, and in the rest of the body. When you’re ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. Find an image that captures this gradual release of tension for you: the sun melting ice, butter melting, releasing pressure with a valve, et cetera. Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left upper arm and shoulder.

With your leg extended, bend your right foot up at an angle, so the muscles of your right calf, shin, ankle and foot are tensed. Allow the rest of the leg to remain relaxed. Study the sensations of tension. Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of the leg, and in the rest of the body. When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. You may imagine it's like a fire hose that was rigid and becomes more flexible as the water drains out. Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed. Repeat this with your left foot and lower leg.

Tense the muscles in the right buttock and thigh, allowing the remaining muscles in the right leg to remain as relaxed as possible. Study the sensations of tension. Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite buttock and thigh, and in the rest of the body. When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed. Repeat this on the left side.

Suck in your abdominal muscles, and simultaneously push the small of your back against the chair or floor. Study the sensations of tension. Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body. When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Let your head fall forward, or, alternatively, press your head backward against a wall, to tense the muscles in the back of your neck. Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body. When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

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Push your tongue against your upper palette, purse your lips, squint your eyes, tighten your jaw and scrunch up your face. Study the sensations of tension. Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body. When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Take a few slow, deep breaths, and allow yourself to be aware of the sensations throughout your body. If there is any part that remains tense, repeat the exercise there until the tension is gone. Just allow the relaxation to move through your body in waves, allowing yourself to relax more, and more, and more deeply as you continue to take slow, deep breaths. If you like the seashore, you may want to think of gentle waves lapping at the sand, gradually washing away physical, emotional, and mental tension, smoothing ... soothing ...relaxing.

When you are done with the relaxation exercise, allow yourself a few minutes to reorient before getting up. Just enjoy the sensations of relaxation throughout your body. You may notice sensations you have never been aware of before.

Rapid Relaxation Exercises

These are things you can do in a minute or two to feel more relaxed. As you start, take a moment to do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

Abdominal Breathing

Abdominal breathing is one of the most effective ways to relax quickly. By breathing with your diaphragm, you will immediately signal your autonomic nervous system to relax. Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest. Take some slow, deep breaths into the belly. It's helpful, but not essential, to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. If you are doing abdominal breathing correctly, the lower hand should move as much or more than the hand on your chest. Continue this slow, deep breathing for a couple of minutes, imagining the breath calming your body and clearing your mind. Notice how you feel.

Cook's Hookup

With legs extended, cross your left ankle over your right one. With your arms outstretched, cross your right wrist over your left one, then turn your hands so the palms are touching, clasp your fingers, and twist your hands down and toward your ribs, and rest them on your chest. Hold this.

Once you have learned the technique, you don't need to use your hands if you prefer not to.

Position for two minutes as you breathe through your nose. On the in-breath, push your tongue against your upper palette, and on the out-breath push it against your lower palette. When the two-minute period has elapsed, take a minute to notice what you experience in your body.

Quick Tensing and Relaxing

Tense your feet and lower legs and thighs and buttocks, pelvic muscles, abdomen, and lower back muscles. Hold them tightly for a few moments and notice the tension. Then release the tension completely and let all those muscles soften and become supple and relaxed. Tense your hands, forearms, upper arms and shoulders, belly, midriff, middle and upper back, and facial muscles, and take a breath in so your rib cage is fully extended. Notice how that feels, then release the breath and soften all those muscles, letting them become supple and relaxed. As you continue to breathe, focus on releasing, softening, letting go. Let the tension continue to flow out with every out-breath.

Notes

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https://centerforsurvivors.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Relaxation_Exercises.pdf